

# **The Battle of the Narrative**

**A Monograph**

**By**

**Col Mark C. Neate  
British Army**



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**School of Advanced Military Studies  
United States Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas**

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Col Mark C. Neate

Title of Monograph: The Battle of the Narrative

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Gerald S. Gorman, Ph.D.

Monograph Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dan C. Fullerton, Ph.D.

Second Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
Stefan J. Banach, COL, IN

Director,  
School of Advanced  
Military Studies

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

Director,  
Graduate Degree  
Programs

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## **ABSTRACT**

THE BATTLE OF THE NARRATIVE  
by Col Mark C. Neate, British Army, 59 pages.

On March 20, 2003, a United States led coalition invaded Iraq. The character of this conflict can be defined by the West's ability to conduct precision strikes, to manoeuvre and to overwhelm the enemy's command system. Emerging U.K. and U.S. military doctrine posits that conflicts of the future are likely to be defined equally, if not more, by the centrality of influence. Adversaries have recognised the strategic benefits of influencing perceptions and will continue to exploit information and communications technology advances to this end. In a competition of contesting narratives, information will flash around the world in near real time, challenging the abilities of governments and established news networks to react in a timely fashion. Near global transparency increases the risk of inconsequential military incidents being turned into strategic events with adverse connotations. To win the battle of the narratives, the U.K.'s security apparatus must be able to wield influence at all levels, across multiple media, within joint, multinational and interagency environments at a much higher tempo than present.

Consideration of extant and emerging U.K. and U.S. military doctrine reveals a growing understanding of strategic communication. Including how this concept might be articulated such that there is clear delineation of activities at the differing levels of command. Despite this progress, this paper argues that there are, currently, three impediments to the British Armed Forces fully embracing the centrality of influence.

The dynamic nature of the global information environment argues for a strategic communication concept built around a less centralised and more proactive approach than is currently the case. Re-establishing an effective civil military relationship is critical to an evolution from the current stasis of information control to one of empowered information engagement that can be executed locally. If the military narrative is to nest effectively with that of the government's, education programmes must develop officers with political sophistication and nous. Without an educational grounding that exposes the concept of strategic communication, political 'interference', media invasiveness, the power of the cognitive domain and the battle of the narrative the 'centrality of influence' will remain peripheral. Finally, organisational and resource implications require further investigation, but only when there is a sound grasp of the tenets of the strategic communication concept.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

DCDC	Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre
DSPD	Defence Support to Public Diplomacy
DOD	Department of Defense
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ISG	Information Strategy Groups
JDP	Joint Doctrine Publication
JIC	Joint Integrating Concept
JTF	Joint Task Force
JTFC	JTF Commander
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NIS	National Information Strategy
OPSEC	Operational Security
OGD	Other Governmental Departments
SDR	Strategic Defence Review
TIO	Targeting and Information Operations
USG	The United States Government

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.

- Rudyard Kipling<sup>1</sup>

In the Contemporary Operating Environment (COE) information is pervasive, available at the touch of a button, accessible on the move and across the globe. The advent of a global information environment has brought with it a range of opportunities and challenges. New adversaries, equipped with readily available Information and Communications Technology (ICT), have exploited this environment and proven themselves able to challenge and thwart the most powerful nations in the world. For the United Kingdom (U.K.) this strategic environment requires a paradigm shift away from an emphasis on information control to one of comprehensive information engagement. In broad terms, strategic communication seeks to address this information age challenge and align multiple lines of operation that generate, indirectly or directly, effects within the global information environment in support of national objectives.

### **Research Question**

Given the impact of ICT on the character of conflict and the necessity to achieve effective information engagement, this monograph addresses first the question: What is strategic communication? Subsequently, it will then be possible to address: How might U.K. Armed Forces better exploit the tenets of this concept to achieve information engagement? The working hypothesis is that the U.K.'s security realm, in particular Her

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<sup>1</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "Surgeons and the Soul" (banquet speech, Royal College of Surgeons, London, 1923).

Majesty's Government (HMG), must confront the realities of the global information environment and generate the policy necessary to enable U.K. Armed Forces to take a proactive approach to strategic communication.

### **The Character of Modern Conflict**

Prior to identifying a methodology that will substantiate this hypothesis, it is necessary to expand upon the evolving character of conflict so as to frame the context that underpins what the U.S. defense community has labelled strategic communication. Perhaps two of the greatest twentieth century geo-strategic security catalysts have been the fall of the Berlin Wall, heralding a “unipolar world in which the United States enjoyed unrivalled freedom of action”, and the proliferation of ICT, enabling a “slow and gradual shift from a unipolar to a complex multipolar world.”<sup>2</sup> With the demise of the Soviet Union and the bi-polar standoff, the international landscape has, surprisingly for some, continued to prove unpredictable, encompassing new security challenges. Success in future conflict will depend not only on military factors but will require the integration of all aspects of state power, often in partnership with allies. There is no simple choice between hard and soft power, rather all instruments of national power must be synchronised and integrated such that complementary activities achieve a unity of effort – what is now being labelled as ‘smart power’ within the British defence community. The military instrument must act as part of a comprehensive response and not in isolation.<sup>3</sup>

These challenges have dictated that states reconsider their understanding of national security, broadening consideration beyond the traditional focus of threats to the

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<sup>2</sup> Shawn Brimley, “Crafting Strategy in an Age of Transition,” *Parameters* 38, no.4 (Winter 2008-09): 31.

<sup>3</sup> U.K. MoD, *Future Land Operating Concept 2008* (Development, Doctrine and Concepts Centre, 2008), 1-4.



state and its interests from other states. Within the United Kingdom, “the focus has shifted to a diverse but interconnected set of threats and risks” including international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, conflicts and failed states, pandemics and trans-national crime.<sup>4</sup> The consensus within Western thinking is that while the nature of conflict remains timeless, the character reflects the unique conditions of the era.

Superficial consideration of the United Kingdom’s major military operations over the last 28 years highlight the unpredictability and variety of security challenges.<sup>5</sup> With the exceptions of the Falkland Islands conflict and the 1991 Gulf War, these operations were conducted ‘among the people’. There has been a paradigm shift from what might be identified as the interstate war of the industrialised era to what General Rupert Smith labelled as “war amongst the people” in what some have characterised as the ‘information age’.<sup>6</sup>

This thinking is reflected in the U.K. government’s current National Security Strategy, which states:

Almost every domain of national security activity has an important information dimension. Military campaigns must command the support of public opinion, and secure the support of the people amongst whom they are carried out. Indeed some have argued that for much military activity, the very purpose is to win the support of the people concerned rather than some more traditional physical objective.<sup>7</sup>

Many argue that the characteristics of conflict that are evident in Iraq, Afghanistan and the 2006 Lebanon conflict are conditions that will repeat themselves in the future: war

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<sup>4</sup> U.K. MoD, “The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Update 2009,” *Security for the Next Generation* (London: Crown Copyright, 2009), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Northern Ireland, Falkland Islands, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Iraq and Afghanistan.

<sup>6</sup> General Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 5; Keohane and Nye, “Power Interdependence, and the Information Age” in Richard K. Betts *Conflict after the Cold War*, Second Edition (Longman, 2002), 548.

<sup>7</sup> U.K. MoD, *Security for the Next Generation*, 105.

amongst and for the people, illegal non-state actors including criminals and terrorists, a mix of conventional and irregular tactics, with high and low technical capabilities, and the primacy of the information domain being amongst them. As the author Colin Gray notes, the future belongs to both regular and irregular styles of combat, sometimes simultaneously.<sup>8</sup> This form of warfare is, in large part, a war of ideas, the battle largely for perception, and the key battleground is in the mind – that of the indigenous population and of regional and world opinion.<sup>9</sup>

With the advent of globalised communications, the aspirations and expectations of those who perceive themselves to be disadvantaged have been, and will continue to be, raised.<sup>10</sup> This perception of disadvantage and opportunity will stimulate grievances that, under the correct conditions, can provide a fertile medium for hostility. As the Commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command, General Mattis notes: “The new high ground for operational forces will be to capture the perceptions of populations, not necessarily to seize terrain.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, it is increasingly evident that military forces are unable to avoid being drawn into operations in the urban and littoral regions, where the majority of the global population lives, and where political and economic activity is concentrated.<sup>12</sup> Regardless of individual views on the character of conflict and what label is assigned, the

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<sup>8</sup> Colin S. Gray, “The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Security Environment and the Future of War,” *Parameters* 38, no.4 (Winter 2008-09): 23.

<sup>9</sup> Ranstrop, Magnus and Graeme P Herd, “Approaches to Countering Terrorism and CIST,” quoted in Anne Aldis and Graeme P Herd, *The Ideological war on Terror. Worldwide Strategies for Counter-Terrorism* (London, Routledge, 2007), 3.

<sup>10</sup> Lieutenant General William B. Caldwell IV, Dennis M. Murphy and Anton Menning, “Learning to Leverage New Media,” *Military Review* (May-June 2009): 3.

<sup>11</sup> General James N. Mattis, “Balancing the Force for Defense and Security” (lecture RUSI Land Warfare Conference, London, June 23, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, Army Doctrine Publication, *Operations in the Land Environment* (2 Star/Trial Draft Dec 17, 2009), 2-2.

concept of ‘conflict among the people’ and increasing connectivity through ICT are characteristics that transcend conceptual categorisations.<sup>13</sup>

### Overview of Key Terms

“It is time for us to take a harder look at ‘strategic communication’. Frankly, I don’t care for the term. We get too hung up on that word, strategic. If we’ve learned nothing else these past 8 years, it should be that the lines between strategic, operational, and tactical are blurred beyond distinction. This is particularly true in the world of communication, where videos and images plastered on the Web - or even the idea of their being so posted - can and often do drive national security decision making. But beyond the term itself, I believe we have walked away from the original intent. By organizing to it - creating whole structures around it - we have allowed strategic communication to become a thing instead of a process, an abstract thought instead of a way of thinking. It is now sadly something of a cottage industry.”

- Admiral Michael Mullen<sup>14</sup>

The origin of the phrase ‘strategic communication’ is unclear; however, that it has become the source of considerable discussion is evident from the thrust of Admiral Mullen’s statement. Much of the debate as to what is strategic communication, who is responsible, what are the organisational implications and such like, has been conducted in the United States and, specifically, within the U.S. defense community. Albeit there is no directive authority charged with comprehensive strategic communication policy formulation the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) definition is:

Focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes,

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<sup>13</sup> For example, Asymmetric Warfare, Hybrid Warfare, Major Combat Operations, Stabilisation Operations and Irregular Warfare.

<sup>14</sup> Admiral Michael G. Mullen, “Strategic Communication – Getting Back to Basics,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 55, 4th quarter (2009): 2-4.

messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.<sup>15</sup>

This military definition is expanded further as “The United States Government (USG) uses strategic communication to provide top-down guidance relative to using the informational instrument of national power in specific situations.”<sup>16</sup> The predominant military activities that support the strategic communication themes and messages are information operations (IO), public affairs (PA), and defence support to public diplomacy (DSPD).<sup>17</sup>

In comparison, there is no endorsed U.K. Ministry of Defence (MoD) definition of strategic communication. Arguably, the closest comparator is that of the ‘information strategy’ defined as:

Information activity coordinated across Government that influences decisions, opinions and outcomes in order to support the National Strategic Aim and associated policy objectives.<sup>18</sup>

That said, more recent doctrine introduces the concept of influence activities defined as:

Influence Activities seek to affect understanding and thus the character or behaviour of an individual, group or organisation. They do so by manipulating information ahead of its receipt, or perceptions of that information once received.<sup>19</sup>

As a further expose of U.K. military thinking, evolving doctrine posits the concept of ‘cognitive methods’ that can have significant consequences for comparatively little expenditure and risk.<sup>20</sup> Albeit not defined other than to explain that it is sometimes confusingly referred to as ‘influence activities’, this concept includes information action,

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. Joint Publication 1-02, *DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (August 19, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* (February 13, 2008), I-2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> U.K. Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operation* (September 2007), 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> U.K. Joint Doctrine Publication 01, *Campaigning*, 2d ed., (December 2008), 3-14.

<sup>20</sup> Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, *Operations in the Land Environment*, 3-6.

operational security and media action. The broad thrust of the British position is that power, be it hard or soft, seeks to alter, directly or indirectly, and intentionally or unintentionally, perceptions and behaviour. Power, be it through compulsion or persuasion, is utilised to achieve influence, which is an outcome not an activity.<sup>21</sup> The British see influence as a product not just of information domain exploitation but of action and words as well. This cognitive contest, or battle of the narrative, should be central to the utilisation of military power.

### **Methodology**

Greater than the tread of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come.

- Victor Hugo<sup>22</sup>

Within the both the U.S. and U.K. defence communities, it is evident that the general thrust of how to exploit the global information environment, and all that this might entail, is the subject of an ongoing debate. Given the social connotations of all forms of communication, this monograph employs a qualitative research methodology utilising the analysis model of 'performance evaluation'.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, as opposed to a methodological orthodoxy, a flexible (emergent) research strategy is employed whereby attention will be paid to the tenets and theories that emerge through consideration of current thinking and direction, as opposed to reliance on *a priori* concepts and ideas. Consequently, Chapter 2 examines existing and evolving United States and United Kingdom literature with a view to identifying commonality and the inherent military

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<sup>21</sup> Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, *Operations in the Land Environment*, 3-1.

<sup>22</sup> Victor Hugo, diary entry, quoted in John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1984), 1.

<sup>23</sup> The Independent Evaluators' Webring, *Definitions of evaluation types, approaches and fields*, [http://www.evaluators-webring.net/Independent\\_evaluators\\_webring\\_definitions\\_May06.pdf](http://www.evaluators-webring.net/Independent_evaluators_webring_definitions_May06.pdf) (accessed August 9, 2009). Performance evaluation defined as an analysis undertaken at a given point in time to compare actual performance with that planned in terms of both resource utilisation and achievement of objectives. This is generally used to redirect efforts and resources and to redesign structures.

implications; clarifying the broader aspects of the setting in which policy works is also critical. In Chapter 3, these findings are used to analyse the United Kingdom's current approach through consideration of three case studies to identify whether the policy is implemented as envisaged and the reasons for deviation from the original design. Finally, Chapter 4 recommends enhancements to current United Kingdom policy and practice.

### **The British National Context – The Time is Right**

As with all research, the findings of the evaluation are much more likely to be used if they address current policy issues and there is a commitment to adapt. The U.K. Government's position is that 'what counts is what works' and this declaration should provide the basis for policy making.<sup>24</sup> On July 7, 2009, the British Secretary of State for Defence, the Right Honourable Bob Ainsworth, announced to Parliament the beginning of a process leading to a Strategic Defence Review (SDR). The results of the SDR will be placed in the context of a National Security Strategy. In large, the SDR seeks to ensure that British Armed Forces have the capability necessary to meet tomorrow's challenges. The requirement for such a review has been welcomed by the military. Despite year on year rises in the defence vote (2.1 per cent average annual real term increases between 1997 and 2006 and 1.5 per cent planned from 2007 to 2011), British Forces continue to operate at levels beyond the Defence Planning Assumptions that underpin their budget. In short, the cash has been inadequate to meet the demand.<sup>25</sup> In

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<sup>24</sup> U.K. Cabinet Office Strategic Policy Making Team, *Professional Policy Making for the Twenty First Century* (September 1999), 33, <http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/policyhub/docs/profpolicymaking.pdf>. (accessed July 30, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> Michael Clarke, *The Defence Review: Formally Announced but Already Begun*, vol. 29 no.7 (July 2009), <http://www.rusi.org/publications/newsbrief/ref:A4A5733CE5557C/> (accessed September 8, 2009).

light of the emerging effects of the global economic crisis, which portend severe public spending constraints, it appears inevitable that British defence spending will be curtailed.

The SDR seeks to reconcile the current priority of ensuring that the British Armed Forces have the equipment and support required for operations in Afghanistan and, in parallel, to ensure they are suitably resourced to meet the challenges of tomorrow. As an opening gambit, the preceding ‘Green Paper’ will tackle a range of issues including “the contribution defence can make to the projection of soft power – exerting influence to prevent conflicts.”<sup>26</sup> Given the United Kingdom’s doctrinal assertion that ‘cognitive methods’ can have significant consequences for comparatively little expenditure and risk, embracing strategic communication, with whatever label is deemed appropriate, warrants consideration of an urgency not yet replicated in doctrine and practice.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> U.K. MoD DIB 2009/28, *Strategic Defence Review*, <http://defenceintranet.diiweb.r.mil.uk/DefenceIntranet/New/BriefingNotes/MOD> (accessed December 16, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> U.K. MoD, *Operations in the Land Environment*, 3-1.

## CHAPTER 2

### DEFINING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

There is a war out there, old friend – a World War. And it's not about whose got the most bullets; it's about who controls the information: what we see and hear, how we work, what we think. It's all about the information.

- Cosmo<sup>28</sup>

#### The Information Environment

Before launching into further consideration of both the United States' and United Kingdom's strategic communication related literature, it is worth, briefly, building on the characteristics of future conflict as they appertain to the global information environment.<sup>29</sup> Most crises take place within the spotlight of the information domain. By way of example, no other war has been as extensively reported as was the 2003 Iraq War.<sup>30</sup> This potential level of awareness has been brought about by the advances in technology, in radio and television, such as satellite broadcasting, the increasingly porous nature of international borders and the availability of relatively cheap printing or copying equipment that has brought printed media to increasingly larger audiences. Many people now have the ability to access information directly via the Internet. Without necessarily knowing or questioning its authenticity, many accept what they see and hear at face value, particularly if it reinforces their own perceptions. The Internet is used to spread or

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<sup>28</sup> Phil Alden Robinson (director), *Sneakers*, 1992.

<sup>29</sup> Neither U.S. nor U.K. joint doctrines define the phrase 'information environment'. For the purpose of this thesis, it is defined as 'the medium, and all the associated means, through which a stimulus is recognised and conveyed to an individual or human group'.

<sup>30</sup> Ralph D. Berenger, "Global Media Go to War," in *Global Media Go to War*, ed. Ralph D. Berenger (Spokane: Marquette Books, 2004), 27.



circulate information and opinion, including rumour, with a speed inconceivable only a few years ago.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly not a physical weapon in itself, strategic communication is, as Admiral Mullen, U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, asserted, a way of thinking about human relationships.<sup>32</sup> In the comprehensive textbook 'Information Operations,' the Islamic extremist September 11 attack on the "Great Satan" is described as not only a hard power activity but, in a more important sense, an attempt to achieve influence through utilisation of the information environment.<sup>33</sup> That Osama bin Laden largely misread his global audience and that the atrocity served, amongst other things, to reaffirm the United States resolve serves notice of the close relationship between influence activities and cultural understanding. This failure apart, post September 11 adversaries have rapidly exploited the opportunities to fuse information with new and readily available ICT, exploiting one hundred dollar cameras and wireless Internet connections, to influence perceptions through global informational persuasion. These adversaries know that opinions can be changed; a video camera in some remote South East Asia cave is considered as powerful, if not more so, than a physical weapon system. Information - its utility, effect and management as it contributes to influence - should be considered at the core of future campaigns and operational planning, and done so not in isolation but in conjunction with physical military activity.

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<sup>31</sup> U.K. Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations*, 1-1.

<sup>32</sup> Admiral Michael G. Mullen, *Joint Forces Quarterly* 55, 2-4.

<sup>33</sup> Leigh Armistead, ed., *Information Operations: Warfare and the Hard Reality of Soft Power*, (Washington DC: Brassey's, n.d.), 3.

## **The Case for Contrasting U.S. and U.K. Military Doctrine**

There would appear to be no authoritative U.S. government policy that either defines strategic communication or charges an organisation or department with the responsibility for coordinating a comprehensive strategy. A 2009 RAND Cooperation “Whither Strategic Communication” occasional paper reviewed contemporary United States thinking regarding the advancement of strategic communication. The paper, in noting that thus far the concept had been “plagued by misses and false starts”, deduced that “strategic communication needs leadership, including authority to compel coordination, high-level commitment to strategic communication at the enterprise level.”<sup>34</sup> Given this deduction and the sentiments expressed by Admiral Mullen, the merit of contrasting British doctrine against that of the U.S. military warrants justification.

A cursory examination of the U. K.’s National Security Strategy reveals that security overseas will favour a multilateral approach. However, the United States is identified as “our most important bilateral partner” and, within a global context, this relationship remains “critical.”<sup>35</sup> The MoD is somewhat more emphatic in its concepts document *Future Character of Conflict*, asserting, “we will routinely operate with allies and partners, in particular as a supporting partner in a US-led coalition. It is extremely unlikely that the United Kingdom will conduct warfighting without United States leadership, but in other operations the United Kingdom may be called upon to lead a non-

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<sup>34</sup> Christopher Paul, *Whither Strategic Communication? A Survey of Current Proposals and Recommendations* (Santa Monica: RAND Cooperation, 2009), 16.

<sup>35</sup> U.K. Cabinet Office, *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom*, 109.

United States coalition.”<sup>36</sup> In this context, the MoD highlights the necessity to identify the practicalities of United Kingdom and United States interoperability.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in examining the themes inherent in future conflict the MoD deduces that “the battle of the narratives will be key, and the United Kingdom must conduct protracted influence activity.”<sup>38</sup> The SDR “Green Paper” specifically addresses strategic communication stating it has “been treated as a supporting activity rather than as a decisive factor; and as a unilateral activity which fails to take full account of adversaries’ communications aims and activities.”<sup>39</sup> The paper goes on to identify how strategic communication must adapt from a primary focus on influencing governments to consideration of individuals and non-state groups and be “coordinated with our partners.”<sup>40</sup>

Given the U.K. government’s recognition of the bilateral security relationship with the United States, and that both countries are struggling to come to grips with how to implement a comprehensive strategic communication policy, the scope for combined development is apparent. A combined approach to doctrinal development is not new; for example, the British Army was closely involved in the U.S. Army’s and Marine Corps’ development of Counter Insurgency doctrine, the content of which informed their own doctrinal revision. Thus, it is apparent that maintaining the ability to inter-operate with the U.S. military is a major imperative for the British military. Indeed, it forms the first assumption underpinning the British military’s vision for military capability and

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<sup>36</sup> U.K. MoD, *Strategic Trends Programme: Future Character of Conflict*, 3, <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/MicroSite/DCDC/OurPublications/Concepts/FutureCharacterOfConflict.htm> (accessed December 10, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> U.K. MoD, *Strategic Trends Programme*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>39</sup> U.K. MoD, *Adaptability and Partnership: Issues for the Strategic Defence Review*, 19, [http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/790C77EC-550B-4AE8-B227-14DA412FC9BA/0/defence\\_green\\_paper\\_cm7794.pdf](http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/790C77EC-550B-4AE8-B227-14DA412FC9BA/0/defence_green_paper_cm7794.pdf) (accessed February 4, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

operations out to 2020, as articulated in the “Joint High Level Operational Concept”. In sum, it is not sufficient to address strategic communication through, for example, geographic separation of responsibilities when deployed on multi-national operations. The global information environment does not recognise geographic boundaries. Consistent with both United Kingdom and United States national security strategies, coherence and interoperability are the keys to success.

### **Extant United States Doctrine**

Those who observe the U.S. military and its approach to initiating, formulating and validating concepts that shape both doctrine and capability development will not be surprised by the sentiment expressed by Admiral Mullen. The capacity and energy of the United States defence behemoth is such that, should an emerging idea gain traction, the disparate resources that might through direction, initiative or commercial interest become involved is staggering if not bewildering. From a positive viewpoint, the spread and depth of discussion is such that the product will generally reflect a rigorous and wide debate. However, as Admiral Mullen infers, the “cottage industry” that can develop around an emerging concept can lead to products and services that are often unique and distinctive – ironically, the very antithesis of that which strategic communication seeks as an outcome.

Joint Publication 3-0 *Joint Operations*, explains how through ‘strategic guidance’ the President and Secretary of Defense, through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, direct the national effort that supports combatant and subordinate commanders. This strategic direction, it is inferred, will incorporate U.S. government strategic communication guidance “relative to using the informational instrument of national

power in specific situations.”<sup>41</sup> Subsequent discussion identifies three dimensions of the information environment as being physical, informational, and cognitive. The physical dimension is composed of the command and control systems and supporting infrastructures, which enable individuals and organizations to conduct operations across the air, land, maritime, and space domains. The informational dimension is where information is collected, processed, stored, disseminated, displayed, and protected. The cognitive dimension encompasses the mind of the decision-maker and the target audience. Commanders and staff think, perceive, visualise, and decide in this dimension. Factors such as leadership, morale, unit cohesion, emotion, state of mind, level of training, experience, situational awareness, as well as public opinion, perceptions, media, public information, and rumours influence this dimension.<sup>42</sup>

Further detailed examination of information operations, a predominant military activity embraced within strategic communication, is available in Joint Publication 3-13 *Information Operations*. This doctrine acknowledges that U.S. DOD efforts must be part of a government-wide approach to develop and implement a more robust strategic communication capability. Furthermore, it directs that combatant commanders should integrate an information strategy into planning which is to be approved by the Office of the Secretary of Defense.<sup>43</sup> However, detailed explanation as to what U.S. government strategic communication direction will be received and how it relates to the various components of strategic communication as defined by the military is absent. This deficiency, in all likelihood, reflects a lack of both clear direction on where strategic

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<sup>41</sup> U.S. Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, I-2

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., II-22.

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Joint Publication 3-13, *Information Operations* (February 13, 2006), I-10.

authority for coordination lies and a clear ‘Whole of Government’ definition of what it entails.

### **A United States Commander’s Perspective**

Doctrinal evolution and organisational limitations apart, combatant commanders have pursued their role in supporting the national security strategic communication effort with vigour. In a 2009 *Joint Forces Quarterly* article, the Commander of U.S. Southern Command, Admiral James Stavridis, clearly outlines how his command has embraced the concept as an “enabling capability for our policy and planning decisions and actions.”<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, Admiral Stavridis draws a parallel between strategic communication as a branch of the art of war comparable to logistics or intelligence. Furthermore, he goes on to point out that in order to develop the correct regional approach, the command examined a number of historical examples. The product of these case studies is a series of principles that serve to guide their strategic communication focus. Within this guidance, a number of deductions warrant exposure, particularly in the absence of definitive doctrine.

Unsurprisingly, the Admiral notes “it does no good whatsoever to have a perfect strategic communication plan that is ultimately contradicted, as - unfortunately - is often the case.”<sup>45</sup> He reinforces this point by observing that a ‘Whole of Government’ approach is required to achieve a shared understanding. This practitioner’s viewpoint draws attention to the absence of a national-level coordinating authority. The textbook ‘Information Operations’ draws the same conclusion in stating, “only through cross-departmental communication flow by all organizations will Information Operations

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<sup>44</sup> Admiral James G. Stavridis, “Strategic Communication and National Security”, *Joint Forces Quarterly* 46, 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2007, 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

become the true force multiplier that it has the potential to be.”<sup>46</sup> Secondly, he draws a demarcation between strategic communication as a strategic level process whereas tactical level application lies within the realm of public affairs and all associated efforts. This clarification might be usefully articulated in doctrine albeit further consideration of the relationship with information operations and defence support to public diplomacy is required. Finally, of note, he admits that measuring results is a critical path that, at the time of writing, was in an infant state. He offers a number of assessment tools although his remarks indicate that further more detailed doctrinal consideration would be welcome - accepting that generic tools will have to be tailored to the prevailing circumstances.<sup>47</sup>

### **United States Doctrinal Evolution**

Accepting that doctrinal development and its subsequent cascade will inevitably lead to discrepancy, particularly given the concurrent challenges that currently demand resources; there is none-the-less increasing recognition of the central role of influence and its relationship with strategic communication. More recent to the doctrine considered above is a Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept (JIC) released in October 2009 by the Joint Staff.<sup>48</sup> The JIC attempts to stimulate informed discussion and experimentation and is not prescriptive; however, it does mark a path that indicates how strategic communication might develop. Some key issues are worthy of consideration,

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<sup>46</sup> Leigh Armistead, ed., *Information Operations: Warfare and the Hard Reality of Soft Power*, (Washington DC: Brassey's, n.d.), 47.

<sup>47</sup> Admiral James G. Stavridis, *Joint Forces Quarterly* 46, 4. There are obviously many means of doing so, but a few crucial ones include polling by reputable local firms and backing up the polls with an international polling firm; contacting individual trusted and sensible interlocutors for candid assessments; monitoring articles in journals, newspapers, and other publications; sampling Web content, including blogs; observing television and radio coverage; and working with a local public relations firm. Whereas doctrine merely cites measures of effectiveness as a J2 responsibility with no further expansion, see U.S. Joint Publication 3-13, *Information Operations*, 2-12.

<sup>48</sup> U.S. DOD Joint Staff, *Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept*, Version 1 (October 7, 2009).

both to indicate the nature of United States military thinking and to assist when contrasting the British approach.

The JIC asserts that the purpose of “all purposeful communications is to influence” through which an effect is created - be it observable behaviour or an unobservable attitude - which convinces the target audience to think and act in ways compatible with United States objectives.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, it recognises that the act of communication is as much about listening as it is transmitting. Generating an influence effect applies not only to information but also to physical communication, the concept being that actions convey meaning. Herein lies the difficulty which might be the cause of Admiral Mullen’s “cottage industry” frustration. If every action of the Joint Force is potentially observable and therefore reportable, it can be stated that every action is a signal and thus, potentially, falls within the scope of strategic communication. The JIC posits that strategic communication in 2016 to 2028 will not be an ‘adjunct activity’ but will be inherent in the planning and conduct of all operations. The premise being that any misalignment of information and action will undermine credibility and legitimacy.<sup>50</sup> That said, the JIC tends to alternate between the use of the phrase strategic communication and the words influence and information. Understanding the importance and application of influence is identified as a primary military function with the recommendation that it should be institutionalised throughout the DOD.

The relationship between doctrinal categorisations apart, the JIC recognises the demands of the global information environment and the requirement for an adaptive, heuristic approach. In particular, emphasis is placed on the commander in terms of both

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<sup>49</sup> U.S. DOD Joint Staff, *Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept*, 5.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



understanding potential audiences and enabling subordinates to respond to local variations in the information environment. These command demands will necessitate the absorption of strategic communication into the core curricula of professional military education and training. The JIC also suggests that future strategic communication will tend to be more proactive than strategic communication today.<sup>51</sup> This reinforces the requirement for further education and training to enable decentralisation such that subordinate commanders are not unduly restricted and can act within the parameters of unifying guidance.

### **United Kingdom Whole of Government**

As is the case in the United States, there is no overarching United Kingdom national expression of strategic communication. That said, there is increasing use of the term within government departments. For example, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) identifies strategic communication as:

The systematic approach to delivering business objectives by generating more effective understanding of audiences and more effective methods of connecting with them to develop solutions that shift attitudes and change behaviours.<sup>52</sup>

The article goes on to note that the relationship between government and citizens is changing rapidly, reflecting advances in the information environment. Older, more established communication techniques are insufficient, lending new urgency to the need for government to engage credibly with the public in order to change behaviours for the common good. Interestingly, the author draws his insights from consideration of the application of strategic communication from its business-orientated application in

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<sup>51</sup> U.S. DOD Joint Staff, *Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept*, 20.

<sup>52</sup> U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Strategic communication and behaviour change: lessons from domestic policy," by Conrad Bird. <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-us/publications-and-documents/publications1/pd-publication/behaviour-change> (accessed December 19, 2009).

domestic policy. He asserts, however, that these lessons have applicability to international issues such as globalisation, international terrorism and climate change. These developments apart, Alastair Campbell, former press secretary to Tony Blair, has stated that, “Although vitally important, the concept of strategic communications is still chronically misunderstood to the detriment of government departments and trans-governmental organizations,” before adding that “rather than being a force for manipulation, strategic communication is an essential process which gives the policy makers the space they need to get from A to B.”<sup>53</sup>

Intra-departmental concept development initiatives are commendable but, if the United Kingdom is to speak with one voice, some form of top down coordination is required. Indeed, Campbell speaks of a ‘process’ whereas the FCO definition infers a much closer linkage to a cognitive effect. In the recently released MoD Green Paper, the concept of strategic communication is outlined in the context of the global information environment. This discussion paper recognises how the Department has increased its engagement with the media but suggests more could be done; for example, use of formats such as social networking sites and blogs are cited.<sup>54</sup> Significantly, the paper recognises that the primary focus on influencing governments must now shift to ways in which the individual or non-state group can be engaged. Of further interest is that the brief discussion of strategic communication is broadly in terms of better exploiting all forms of media to influence the target audience and conducted by all levels of command. This, as will be explained, runs somewhat counter to the evolving British military

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<sup>53</sup> Alistair Campbell, (address, Albany Associates Strategic Communications in Countries Emerging from Violent Conflict Conference, London, June 24, 2009), <http://blog.albanyassociates.com/?tag=strategic-communications> (accessed October 12, 2009).

<sup>54</sup> U.K. MoD, *Adaptability and Partnership: Issues for the Strategic Defence Review* (Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, February 21, 2010).

conceptualisation that separates strategic communication from the associated activities conducted at the operational and tactical levels of command.

### **Extant United Kingdom Doctrine**

“The Future Character of Conflict” is a detailed study by the MoD’s Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), conducted in consultation with key allies and partners, which sets out the global and national strategic context for Defence. The study finds that whereas the last military era was defined by the West’s ability to conduct precision strikes, the future will be defined more by the ‘centrality of influence’.<sup>55</sup> As already evidenced in sites such as YouTube, ‘the battle of the narrative’ will weaken the pre-eminence of global news providers and make data available to individuals in near real time. The study deduces that if the MoD is to prevail in this environment, it must be able to exert influence at all levels, across the target spectrum, in concert with allies and partners and at much higher tempo than now.

At the operational level, Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP) 3-0 *Campaign Execution*, describes ‘Joint Action’ as the framework for considering the coordination and synchronisation of all activity within the battlespace. It is defined as ‘the deliberate use and orchestration of military capabilities and activities to realise effects on other actors’ will, understanding and capability, and the cohesion between them’.<sup>56</sup> It is a metaphor for the enduring relationships between fires, influence activities and manoeuvre.<sup>57</sup> These descriptive nouns assist in determining primary activities seeking physical (fires) or psychological (influence activities) effects but it is their inter-relationship within Joint Action, rather than categorisation, that is key. The embodiment

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<sup>55</sup> U.K. MoD, *Future Character of Conflict*, 12.

<sup>56</sup> U.K. JDP 3-0, *Campaign Execution* (October 2009), 3-1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-2.

of influence activities, and the synergistic effect that is to be achieved within Joint Action, reflects a growing understanding of the significance of the information environment. Influence activities are described as encompassing a variety of activities and supporting functions: some undertaken by a Joint Task Force (JTF) (presence, posture and profile) and others by a JTF Commander (JTFC) himself (key leadership engagement). Some may be within a JTFC's gift or control (Information Operations) while others may simply present opportunities to shape the activities of others (Media Operations).<sup>58</sup> The Joint Action conceptual structure, and Influence Activity in particular, is depicted below:

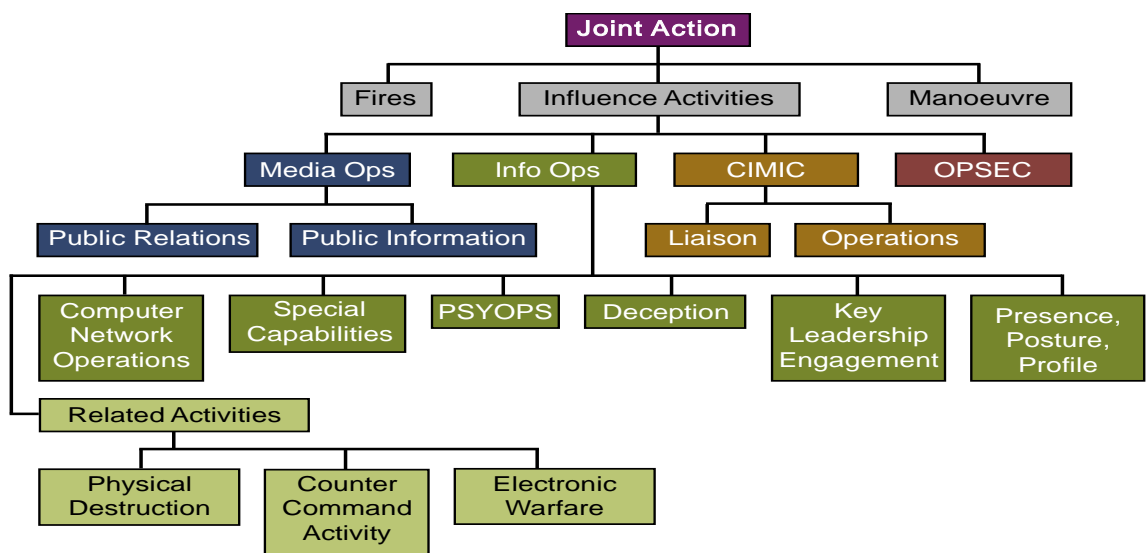


Figure 1. Influence Activities Structure<sup>59</sup>

At the strategic level, the coordinated information output of all government departments is articulated in an Information Strategy. This strategy encapsulates policy and the desired outcomes, providing focus for government activity and utilising all

<sup>58</sup> U.K. JDP 3-0, *Campaign Execution*, 3A-3.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 3A-5.

instruments of national power. At the operational level the Joint Commander, and below him the JTFC, will provide Media Operations, Information Operations, Civil-Military Co-operation and Operational Security documents as annexes to their respective directive directives and orders.<sup>60</sup>

This examination of strategic and operational doctrine clearly reinforces the idea that all activity has influence as its central theme. Influence is achieved when the behaviour of the target audience is changed through the coordination of fires, influence activities and manoeuvre within the framework of Joint Action. Doctrine that is more recent has built upon this theme and formally introduced the concept of strategic communication. JDP 3-40 *Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution*, released in November 2009, describes strategic communication as:

Strategic communication is the articulation of cross-government guidance on influence and supports the synchronisation of the words and deeds of friendly actors to maximise desired effects.<sup>61</sup>

JDP 3-40 specifically distinguishes between strategic communication as a strategic concept and Media Operations, Information Operations, Civil-Military Co-operation and Operational Security as being within the realm of the theatre commander: “As the term implies, being pitched at the strategic level, many of the ways and means used to conduct strategic communication fall outside the remit of the commander.”<sup>62</sup> This doctrine clearly states that the relationship between strategic communication and the “operational military contribution is known as *influence activities*.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> U.K. JDP 3-0, *Campaign Execution*, 3A-3.

<sup>61</sup> U.K. JDP 3-40, *Security and Stabilisation: The Military Contribution* (November 2009), 3-12.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

## United Kingdom Doctrinal Evolution

In the continuing development of the theme ‘centrality of influence’, the U.K. MoD is currently writing a JDP series that seeks to clarify the components of military influence and how this should contribute to the wider multi-agency effort, into which it must be woven.<sup>64</sup> Albeit in ‘draft’ JDP 3-80 *Influence*, builds upon the definition of strategic communication and defines it as:

Strategic communication is the articulation of cross-Government guidance on influence and supports the synchronisation of the words and deeds of friendly actors to achieve desired effects. Emanating from, and seeking effects at, the strategic level, many of the ways and means used to conduct strategic communication are beyond the remit of the commander. National strategic communication messages are coordinated through Targeting and Information Operations (TIO) or the National Information Strategy (NIS). Strategic communication also provides the framework for the delivery of psychological effects at lower levels, through influence activities. Strategic communication has two overlapping aspects – that relating to crisis management and that concerning enduring requirements.<sup>65</sup>

The doctrine describes strategic communication as being coordinated through cross-Government Information Strategy Groups (ISG). These ISG will normally be chaired by a ‘Two Star’ official from the FCO and produce a National Information Strategy (NIS) for each specific operation. Each NIS aims to articulate the strategic narrative to be used across government. Details will include: the campaign objectives and end-state, information objectives, target audiences, a core script, key themes and messages related to campaign progression, channels of communication, measures of effectiveness and planning factors and constraints.

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<sup>64</sup> The JDP 3-80 series comprising JDP 3-80.1 Information Operations, JDP 3-80.2 Media Operations, JDP 3-80.3 Civil-Military Cooperation and JDP 3-80.4 Operational Security.

<sup>65</sup> DCDC, “JDP 3-80 Influence” (Working Draft), 1-5. For release in 2010 at <http://www.mod.uk/defenceinternet/microsite/dcdc>.

Significantly, the emerging doctrine indicates that the Chief of Defence Staff's military strategic directive for a specific operation will include a NIS whereas the Joint Commander will provide direction to the JTFC through the existing mediums of Media Operations, Information Operations, Civil-Military Co-operation and Operational Security annexes. Strategic communication direction responsibility will reside at the governmental level with the theatre commander and subordinates retaining the existing authorities and processes. British military doctrine indicates that strategic communication is not an activity in itself but a framework for considering and coordinating information activity at the national level, which includes the consideration of allies and the host nation.

Unlike some strategic communication advocates, British doctrine does not appear to regard the concept as a weapon system in itself but as an organisational philosophy with associated processes and responsibilities that separate the strategic from the operational and tactical levels of responsibility. Albeit lacking a clear national understanding and authority, the British military have identified strategic communication as, unsurprisingly, a strategic concept which, through a NIS, provides the context for military influence activities at the operational level and below. This theoretical framework appears consistent with the views expressed by Admiral Stavridis but has yet to be accepted and codified in U.S. military doctrine.

Although evolutionary, British joint doctrine continues to articulate and expand upon strategic communication and its relationship with influence activities but there are alternative views with the wider defence community. British Army doctrine describes influence as an outcome rather than an activity. Influence is described as orchestration to

affect the will, understanding and capability of adversaries and other actors, especially those who make decisions which are significant to the success of the campaign or operation (decisive actors).”<sup>66</sup> Within the Joint Action framework, the British Army replaces the phrase ‘influence activities’ with ‘cognitive methods’. The justification being that the phrase influence activities dilutes the centrality of influence as outcome. This level of distinction apart, there is consistency with joint doctrine with regards to a commander’s understanding of influence being based upon familiarity with the NIS, which aims to articulate a strategic narrative that will be used across the Government. Others view strategic communication in a somewhat broader sense.

Commander Tatham’s ‘*Strategic Communication: A Primer*’ defines strategic communication as:<sup>67</sup>

A systemic series of sustained and coherent activities, conducted across strategic, operational and tactical levels, that enables understanding of target audiences, identifies effective conduits, and develops and promotes ideas and opinions through those conduits to promote and sustain particular types of behaviour.<sup>68</sup>

This ground-breaking paper advances a very broad perspective, including capabilities such as the United States’ created Human Terrain Teams and Measurements of Effectiveness that consider strategic communication outcomes at the tactical level. Albeit consistent with the framework of Joint Action, the author does not draw a distinction between strategic communication and influence activities as articulated joint doctrine. In considering this it is possible that the much-hackneyed phrase ‘the strategic corporal’,

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<sup>66</sup> DCDC, *Operations in the Land Environment*, 3-4.

<sup>67</sup> Commander Steve Tatham is a U.K. Royal Navy officer and author, who has seen operational service in Sierra Leone, Iraq and Afghanistan. His first book ‘Losing Arab Hearts & Minds’ was published in 2006 and he is currently working on two further publications. His PhD research is examining the effect of Information and public opinion in future warfare. At the time of his paper on strategic communication he was Director of Media and Communication Research at the UK Defence Academy’s Advanced Research and Assessment Group.

<sup>68</sup> Cdr. S A Tatham, *Strategic Communication: A Primer* (Shrivenham, U.K.: Advanced Research and Assessment Group Special Series, December 2, 2008), 3.



often mis-interpreted as implying some form of strategic leadership authority as opposed to effect or consequence, is the source of confusion. Perhaps the wider connotations of preceding ‘communications’ with ‘strategic’ has provided the ‘wool’ to the “cottage industries” to which Admiral Mullen’s refers. Generating a strategic effect, such as the highly regrettable Abu Ghraib prisoner abuses, is fundamentally different to an activity directed or sanctioned by a strategic authority.

Having identified this ‘British’ doctrinal distinction, it is, however, interesting to observe that although Joint Action characterises activities in the rather presentational and conceptual separation of fires, influence and manoeuvre, operational force structures remain wedded to Cold War constructs. Additionally, although tools such as ‘Rules of Engagement’, legal parameters such as the Laws of Armed Conflict and force and sustainment authorisations provide varying degrees of freedom of action for commanders, there is little direction to guide engagement in the information environment. This, arguably, given the evolutionary nature of doctrine is not surprising; indeed General Sir David Richards, as the designate British Army Chief of the General Staff, has observed:

Self evidently, although not yet culturally internalised, there has been a radical change in the way wars are fought. Morally and importantly legally we cannot go back to operating as we might have done even ten years ago when it was still tanks, fast jets and fleet escorts that dominated the doctrine of our three services. The lexicon of today is non-kinetic effects teams, precision attack teams, Counter-IED, combat logistic patrols, information dominance, counter-piracy, and cyber attack and defence, to give you just a feel for the changes.<sup>69</sup>

Achieving cross-government consensus on what strategic communication is, what an appropriate security framework for coherent application is, how it relates to military

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<sup>69</sup> General Sir David Richards, “Future Character of Warfare” (lecture, RUSI Land Warfare Conference, Whitehall, London, June 24, 2009).

activities and what organisational, educational and training implications are implicit, is clearly a struggle. This bureaucratic and cultural delay masks the otherwise general acceptance that increased weight should be given to influence and winning the battle of the narrative. Adversaries have recognised the strategic power of influencing perceptions and their narratives enjoy a relative freedom, such as being truthful and accurate, and are frequently first. The defence community must seek to synchronise their messages across multinational, interagency and joint seams. For the military, doctrine must be implemented in education, training and organisational routines if it is to result in real change.

### **U.K. Military Constraints**

In addition to constraints implicit within the evolution and implementation of doctrine and the challenges of breaking through bureaucratic resistance, the British military is faced with practical challenges that inhibit its ability to be proactive within the global information environment. This theme will be substantiated in detail in Chapter 3; however, clarification at this stage will provide further context against which to consider the case studies discussed. Defence Instructions and Notices (DIN) provide MoD direction and information on a wide variety of issues. DIN 03-20, *Contact with the Media and Communicating in Public*, provides authorisation procedures for all MoD personnel – military and civilian – wishing to have contact with the media, or write or speak in public. It covers “all public speaking, writing or other communication, including via the internet and other sharing technologies, whether on-duty, off-duty or in spare time, on issues arising from an individual’s official business or experience or

otherwise related to Defence.”<sup>70</sup> Albeit encouraging contact with the media, the DIN states, “such contact must be properly authorised to ensure that the level and nature of the contact is appropriate, as well as to protect individuals against possible misreporting.”<sup>71</sup> Procedures regarding contact with the media and communicating in public are specific, with the exception of cases where specific delegations have been issued:

All personnel of one star rank and civilian equivalent must seek approval . . . before accepting any invitation to speak or write publicly – whether through the media or some other channel. Requests should be submitted at least 14 days in advance . . . All personnel of two star rank and above and civilian equivalent require Ministerial approval. In practice this will be arranged through a . . . weekly planning meeting which will advise if a formal submission is required. Requests should be submitted . . . at least 3 weeks in advance to allow time for due consideration, and, if necessary, a submission.<sup>72</sup>

This level of direction seeks to avoid prejudice to national security, embarrassment to the Government in the conduct of its policies or bring in to question the impartiality of Her Majesty’s Forces.<sup>73</sup> While the principle of military subordination to civilian control is a prerequisite of an effective and efficient democracy, effective Civil Military Relations require senior, strategic level, military officers to provide unambiguous advice that may be counter to existing policy – a theme that will be discussed further in Chapter 3. Furthermore, if operational commanders are to overcome an adversary adept at exploiting the global information environment they too must have the authorities necessary to be proactive and to react in a timely fashion. Furthermore, as the case study examination will identify, commanders must be given the freedom to interpret the strategic narrative, and subordinate influence activity direction, such that

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<sup>70</sup> U.K. MoD DIN03-02, *Contact with the Media and Communicating in Public* (sponsored by Directorate of Communication Planning, November 2008), 1.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>73</sup> U.K. MoD, *The Queen’s Regulations for the Army 1975* (Army Code 13206 - Amendment No 30), J12.019.

their participation is relevant to local variations, recognising that culture is a localised phenomenon.

The DIN represents a cultural mindset that fails to address the strategic communication value, or that encompassed within influence activities, of timely professional military knowledge and expertise. In their article, “The Engagement of Military Voice”, Allen and Coates, two renowned academics from the U.S. professional military education arena, advance the argument that senior military commanders “have the right and obligation to express their voice on issues where they have professional knowledge and expertise” and their civilian leadership “have a concurrent obligation to pay close attention to such advice, even if it contradicts a particular ideology of the leader.”<sup>74</sup> The United Kingdom must evolve from the stasis of information control to one of empowered information engagement.

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<sup>74</sup> Charles D. Allen and Breena E. Coates, “The Engagement of Military Voice,” *Parameters* 39, no.4 (Winter 2009-10): 82.

## CHAPTER 3

### UNITED KINGDOM CASE STUDIES

You may not like what he is saying. You may abhor everything he stands for. But you are listening... The truth is that Osama bin Laden is very good at what he does. He is one of the great propagandists... He has an awesome understanding of the holy triumvirate of political communication: the power of the image, the message and the deed. And he understands how they work together.

- Jason Burke<sup>75</sup>

This chapter, through three case studies, seeks to outline the backdrop that has conditioned the British approach to military strategic communication and, using a corporate and a tactical example, consider practice against extant and emerging U.K. doctrine discussed in Chapter 2. The first study identifies the evolutionary nature of British civil-military relations (CMR) arguing that this dynamic has fundamentally shaped the military's strategic communication 'voice', or lack thereof. As the Defence Budget of £38 billion in 2009-10 is the fourth largest U.K. public sector expenditure, the second case study will examine a recent case of British Army corporate communication that drew 'constitutional' criticism from some commentators and politicians, a further manifestation of how CMR affect the perceived bounds of military strategic communication.<sup>76</sup> Finally, given the British doctrinal distinction between strategic communication and influence activities, the third case examines 52 Brigade's 'influence-led' operation in Afghanistan in 2008. This analysis provides the evidence necessary to substantiate the concluding paragraph, which discusses how the British military might

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<sup>75</sup> Jason Burke, *The Observer*, October 31, 2004.

<sup>76</sup> The United Kingdom's constitution is not contained in a single document, but is drawn from the Magna Carta, The Petition of Right (1628), the English Bill of Rights (1688), numerous Acts, legislation, treaties, judicial precedents, convention, and various other sources.

redirect efforts and resources and the redesign of structures necessary to achieve effective strategic communication.

### **Cultural Inhibitions**

The history of the evolution of British CMR is replete with examples of military strategic figures representing national policy, hardly surprising given their long history as a colonial force<sup>77</sup>. As a colonial force, the soldier was also an administrator, more often than not the senior British representative and a policeman. Hew Strachan observes, “The jobs of commander-in-chief and governor were often combined, and when that happened the joint responsibilities were frequently bestowed on soldiers rather than on civilians.”<sup>78</sup> Strachan records that this approach was maintained well into the twentieth century.<sup>79</sup> With the advent of media on the battlefield, it was not long before senior officers were immersed in strategic communication. As Commander in Chief of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, General Sir Edmund Allenby made an official proclamation of martial law following the fall of Jerusalem, 9 December 1917:

To the Inhabitants of Jerusalem the Blessed and the People Dwelling in Its Vicinity: The defeat inflicted upon the Turks by the troops under my command has resulted in the occupation of your city by my forces. I, therefore, here now proclaim it to be under martial law, under which form of administration it will remain so long as military considerations make necessary....<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> While there is some academic debate over precise dates the period of the ‘First British Empire’ is generally considered to cover the period 1583 (with the claiming of Newfoundland for Queen Elizabeth I) to the conclusion of the American War of Independence in 1783. The ‘Second British Empire’, 1783 – 1815, was dominated by the English East India Company’s conquest of India. Between 1815 -1914, a period often referred to as Britain’s ‘imperial century, around ten million square miles of territory and approximately 400 million people were added to the empire.

<sup>78</sup> Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 76.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. Amongst his examples, Strachan lists Lord Wavell as Viceroy in India in 1941, Sir Gerald Templer being accorded joint military and civil powers in Malaya in 1952 and Field Marshal Sir John Chapple as governor and commander-in-chief in Gibraltar in 1993.

<sup>80</sup> *The King of Hedjaz and Arab Independence*, (London: Hayman, Christy and Lilly, 1917), 12.

Only nine months earlier on March 19, 1917, Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Maude issued the 'Proclamation of Baghdad' shortly after the occupation of the city by British forces. His address began:

Our military operations have as their object the defeat of the enemy, and the driving of him from these territories. In order to complete this task, I am charged with absolute and supreme control of all regions in which British troops operate; but our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators.<sup>81</sup>

Military involvement in politics was deemed unconstitutional in Britain but, strangely, military governance of the empire was not.

In a narrower sense, Dr Stephen Badsey, recognised within the British Army and academic world as a leading expert on military-media operations, in his article 'Mass Politics and the Western Front', investigates how the media reported World War I, and how this influenced the nation's morale.<sup>82</sup> He postulates that the combination of mass politics, begun in the 1880s by the extension of the vote to a majority of men, and the advent of British daily newspapers achieving mass circulation heralded the arrival of the new breed of populist politicians. Dr Badsey records that at the outbreak of World War I, the government introduced various acts to impose press censorship and ban war reporting. Despite these constraints, the Army appointed a serving officer as its official reporter and turned a 'blind eye' to other reporters on the battlefield; indeed, many senior officers engaged with the press directly and soldiers wrote to newspapers. In late 1915, 'cine-cameramen' were attached to the military and their silent black and white movies were shown to the public in Britain and the troops in France. Furthermore, prior to the

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<sup>81</sup> WWI Document Archive, "The Proclamation of Baghdad," under "1917 Documents," [http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The\\_Proclamation\\_of\\_Baghdad](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Proclamation_of_Baghdad) (accessed Mar 31, 2010).

<sup>82</sup> Stephen Badsey, "Mass Politics and the Western Front," under "British History in Depth," BBC website, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain\\_wwone/war\\_media\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwone/war_media_01.shtml) (accessed January 29, 2010).

outset of the Somme offensive, Dr Badsey notes that war correspondents were briefed on the operation and, despite the appalling losses on the first day, went on to report a victory, not through their own deliberate distortion of events but reflecting the briefs given to them by the Army staff and their distant position on the battlefield.

From these brief extracts, it is clear that the British military have, historically, felt sufficiently empowered to represent their political masters and, albeit not strictly comfortable with press reporters, have been aware of the power of the mass media. So how did the British military migrate from their active role in the information environment to a position subject to the constraints of DIN 03-20? In his paper, “Clausewitz in the Age of Al-Jazeera: Rethinking the Military-Media Relationship”, Robin Brown, an academic and author at Leeds University, addresses how understanding of the character of war and the rapid advances in global ICT has impinged on CMR.<sup>83</sup> Brown postulates “total war in the First and Second World Wars reflected the Clausewitzian point that the day to day impact of politics declines as the scale of the conflict expands. Where two opponents aim at the total defeat of the other the requirements of military operations, mobilization and logistics tends to push political influence into the background.”<sup>84</sup> Whereas, during the Cold War he asserts, “Because Cold War conflicts were designated as limited wars there was scope for a greater degree of political questioning of the conflicts and in a public sphere that was less constrained by censorship and governmental publicity that during the earlier conflicts.”<sup>85</sup>

This change in the character of warfare, from total to limited, and the revised

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<sup>83</sup> Robin Brown, “Clausewitz in the Age of Al-Jazeera: Rethinking the Military-Media Relationship,” *Harvard Symposium: Restless Searchlight: The Media and Terrorism* (August 2002), <http://www.apsanet.org/~polcomm/APSA%20Papers/Brown.pdf> (accessed November 19, 2009).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.



nature of the politically-mediated space has been transformed further by technological innovations that affect CMR. Sophisticated command and control technologies have linked the battlefield to national capitals enhancing situational awareness. There is, however, the inherent risk that they also enable ‘the long screwdriver’ and the situation where “local knowledge of those on the ground is over ridden by those further back who believe that they are in a better situation to exercise control.”<sup>86</sup> Naturally, the media and other unofficial actors have utilised, and in many cases driven, the evolution of the global information environment. Consequently, their coverage enables “external groups to exert influence through their political response to events.”<sup>87</sup> The near-global access to real time images and the inevitability of intervening long periods of ‘boredom’, even in war, are now filled with commentary and the speculation of ‘experts’. “From the point of view of policy makers this provides a running critique of the conduct of the conflict” and “it is a critique governed by the rules of the news cycle rather than by the reality of military and diplomatic activity.”<sup>88</sup> The impact of adverse reactions to tactical actions taken by the ‘strategic corporal’ have the potential to generate, on the one hand, a decline in autonomy for the military commander and, on the other, the requirement for the military to be cognisant of what consensus-building effects their actions will have, captured in the doctrinal concept of influence activities.

In his book *The Politics of the British Army*, Hew Strachan states, “What limits the impact of their intervention is not that the army is inherently apolitical – because it is

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<sup>86</sup> Brown, *Harvard Symposium: Restless Searchlight: The Media and Terrorism*, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

not – but the political culture within which the army is operating.”<sup>89</sup> The nature of the relationship between the Clausewitzian trinity of the people, the commander and his army, and the government, has been shaped by a political culture that, over time, has sought to ensure greater control over the military. Strachan’s authoritative account provides many examples of how political culture has affected the British Army’s strategic voice. By way of example, mobilization in 1914 necessitated many key players from the imperial general staff deploying from the centre of political power in London to the Western Front in France. The Committee of Imperial Defence then attempted to fill the ensuing vacuum in London. The professional heads of both the Royal Navy and the British Army were, however, excluded from strategy formulation as discussion now took place within the Cabinet, a body on which neither sat.<sup>90</sup> Consequently, ministers now formulated strategy. Whether this outcome was the result of cynical political manoeuvring is unclear. That, however, the Army’s senior leadership was not averse to exerting political influence was undoubtedly significant.

The relationship between Sir John French, commander of the British Expeditionary Force, and Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War and a distinguished soldier himself, is but one example. In the face of the German advance through Belgium, Sir John opted to fall back rather than lose the British Army in what he considered a futile gesture of support to the French armies. Unhappy with the strategic implications, and under pressure from the French leadership, Kitchener donned his field marshal’s

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<sup>89</sup> Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 119-3. Professor Hew Francis Anthony Strachan, DL, FRSE (born 1 September, 1949 in Edinburgh, Scotland) is a Scottish military historian, well known for his work on the administration of the British Army and the history of the First World War.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-7.

uniform and over-ruled his commander in the field. That the Secretary of State felt it necessary to impose his will as Sir John's military, rather than political, master is indicative of their adversarial relationship. Two months later, following another question of Sir John's moral resolution during the battle of Ypres, Kitchener suggested to Joffre and Foch that he remove his operational commander. The French leadership declined the offer but news of this subterfuge made its way back in to British political circles. Strachan goes on to note that although the actions of the British Army did not in itself bring down the Liberal government, "the point still remains that Sir John French was conspiring to bring down Kitchener at the very least, and if successful the effects of his action were bound – given the popular prestige which Kitchener enjoyed and given the Liberal government's reliance on him for any semblance of strategic authority – to shake Asquith himself."<sup>91</sup>

Albeit a rather generic case study, this brief discussion of CMR evolution highlights some of the historic events that have shaped the British understanding of the military's subordination to the political authority. It also creates further context that helps explain the military's behaviour when conducting strategic communication. In particular, Sir John French's actions, at a time of a weak Liberal government, are particularly pertinent to the next case study, which examines the public intervention of a senior military commander in matters of national policy in a manner some construed as a 'constitutional' breach.

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<sup>91</sup> Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army*, 130-31.

## Corporate Business

The subordination of the military to civilian control is an undeniable tenet of British CMR. The military must accept the democratically-elected leadership and that their political masters will place military advice within the wider gambit of national security. Conversely, the government must recognise the military's specialised knowledge in the application of force. Furthermore, it is axiomatic that an effective relationship may require senior military leaders to wield their professionalism and serve The Queen and country by providing military advice that may not be entirely consistent with national policy.<sup>92</sup> Such was the case in October 2006 when General Sir Richard Dannatt, the previous Chief of the General Staff, spoke out publicly on a number of operational policy issues.

General Dannatt became the professional head of the British Army in 2006 and quickly acquired a reputation for speaking his mind. He is on record as having stated, “everything he says is intended and calculated” and much quoted in drawing public attention to a number of issues. In October 2006 he warned of the risk that the continued presence of British troops in Basra might “exacerbate” the security situation.<sup>93</sup> In the same interview, he said that whatever consent British troops had enjoyed from the Iraqi people had “largely turned to intolerance” and that there was a “moral and spiritual vacuum” in Britain that had allowed Muslim extremists to undermine “our way of life”.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> The oath made by all soldiers at their time of recruitment is: I (name), swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, her heirs and successors and that I will as in duty bound honestly and faithfully defend Her Majesty, her heirs and successors in person, crown and dignity against all enemies and will observe and obey all orders of Her Majesty, her heirs and successors and of the generals and officers set over me.

<sup>93</sup> Michael Evans, *TimesOnline*, March 30, 2009 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/iraq/article5998643.ece> (accessed December 19, 2009).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

He frequently highlighted the pressures the Army was under and warned that it might be broken by the nonstop tempo. He criticised the practice of putting injured servicemen into the same wards as civilians. He has urged the public to come out in support of troops when they return home. The general called for better pay for young soldiers, saying that those serving in Iraq and Afghanistan were paid less than traffic wardens.

The *Daily Mail*, the British tabloid that secured the initial October 2006 interview, described the political reaction to General Dannatt's position on Iraq and British society as having "sent shockwaves through government."<sup>95</sup> The 'constitutional' issue centred around General Dannatt's repudiation of the Prime Minister who maintained that the British involvement in Iraq was morally justified, the military presence did not exacerbate the situation and actions in Iraq positively, rather than negatively, affected domestic security.<sup>96</sup> Although Prime Minister Blair publicly backed General Dannatt's comments, privately cabinet ministers were reported as being furious. "It is not his job to criticise government policy," one said, "he needs to get back in his box and shut up. His next mistake will be his last."<sup>97</sup> Perhaps the most unseemly event in this very fraught period of CMR was, reportedly, an attempted smear campaign launched by a few Labour Members of Parliament. The reported plot sought to expose an extravagant lifestyle including unreasonable costs associated with General Dannatt's entertainment at his official home in Kensington Palace.<sup>98</sup> The campaign backfired when it was revealed that

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<sup>95</sup> Editorial, "Government stunned by Army chief's Iraq blast," *MailOnline*, October 13, 2006, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-410163/Government-stunned-Army-chiefs-Iraq-blast.html> (accessed December 19, 2009).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Michael Smith, *TimesOnline*, June 15, 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/politics/article4138262.ece> (accessed December 19, 2009).

<sup>98</sup> James Kirkup, "General Sir Richard Dannatt facing 'cowardly' smear campaign," *Telegraph.co.uk*, August 19, 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/6056146/General-Sir-Richard-Dannatt-facing-cowardly-smear-campaign.html> (accessed December 19, 2009).

expenses incurred included £5-a-head meals and £1.49 bottles of wine; the media enjoyed comparing this frugality with the excessive parliamentary expenses allowances submitted by a number of politicians.<sup>99</sup>

It was clear that General Dannatt disagreed with his political masters.

Throughout his tenure, his words infuriated ministers, so much so that it was reported that after his retirement on August 28, 2009, some Labour MPs planned to raise questions about the general's role in recent decisions on defence policy. One minister said, "Once he's gone, we can have a go at him. He can write his book and talk all he wants, but he'll be fair game then."<sup>100</sup> Frustration was also echoed by others who questioned the right of the military to openly intervene in politics in an attempt to change government policy. That such power should reside with unelected elites was considered unconstitutional. Matthew Paris, a columnist for *The Times*, summed up the General's intervention taking a strict Huntingtonian position:

There is a constitutional principle at stake, and it is fundamental. The Armed Forces are not in charge of government policy; ministers are - democratically elected ministers. The Armed Forces are there to implement policy, not attack it. They can and must offer advice, of course, but the advice that Service chiefs offer ministers must be absolutely private. It is not their job to try to influence public debate by making statements to the news media.<sup>101</sup>

In publicly voicing his dissenting opinion, General Dannatt exposed CMR's grey areas, which are all the more likely to come to the fore at times of crisis: "dilemmas of conscience, obligation to duty, responsibility to the profession, and accountability to the

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<sup>99</sup> Guy Basnett, "Champagne General?" *News of the World*, August 23, 2009, <http://www.newsoftheworld.co.uk/news/466641/Champagne-general-He-drinks-pound149-plonk-and-shops-at-Lidl-Richard-Dannatt.html> (accessed December 19, 2009).

<sup>100</sup> Kirkup, *General Sir Richard Dannatt facing 'cowardly' smear campaign*, *Telegraph.co.uk*.

<sup>101</sup> Matthew Paris, "I agree with every word that Dannatt said. But he has got to be sacked," *TimesOnline*, October 14, 2006, [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/matthew\\_parris/Article1086242.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/matthew_parris/Article1086242.ece) (accessed December 19, 2009).

Constitution....”<sup>102</sup> That General Dannatt felt obliged to act in the way he did also demonstrated a lack of confidence in the political system and in the political culture that pervaded CMR at the time. Thus, on behalf of his queen and army, it is possible to argue a moral obligation that supports the case for speaking out on an area of military expertise. The dynamic, from General Dannatt’s perspective, appears to be that his professional opinion had either not been given due consideration or had been misrepresented.

The political intrigues that surround this act of strategic communication, interesting though they are, mask the real issue. Organisational injustice, be it a perception of a disregarded military voice or a constitutional breach, is indicative of an unhealthy CMR. If the military is to execute effective strategic communication in support of politically-endorsed desired outcomes, it is essential that CMR be in balance. As it stands, this was clearly not the case. When faced with complex security challenges, a dysfunctional CMR may adversely affect strategic choices. Given, as discussed previously, information and communications technology offer an expanding medium for protagonists to shape the political debate, then it follows that the military too must be able to exploit this environment in a timely fashion. If CMR inhibits strategic communication freedom of action in either scope or time then the savvy adversary is likely to exploit this seam.

## **Influence Activity**

In their paper “Behavioural Conflict,” Mackay and Tatham argue that the British military need to “move influence from the periphery of the command’s thinking to its

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<sup>102</sup> Charles D. Allen and Breena E. Coates, “The Engagement of Military Voice,” *Parameters* 39, No. 4 (Winter 2009-10): 80.

very epicenter.”<sup>103</sup> Their case is built, in the main, around 52 Brigade’s mission execution in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.<sup>104</sup> In discussing a tactical case study, they address numerous issues associated with what Rosen, a former U.S. Defense Department official, identifies as “procedural conservatism.”<sup>105</sup> Although they do not explicitly place their recommendations in the context of the prevailing political culture, they do identify a number of factors that shape the British Army’s apparent inability to keep up with the speed of change in the information age.

In conducting their research, Mackay and Tatham observe that the majority of British ‘Lessons Identified’ information is classified (much unnecessarily) thus inhibiting a broad analytical process and subsequent transition to ‘Lessons Learned’. In turn, this procedural and organisational deficiency detracts from the military education process. By way of example, they note that influence activity associated observations from operations in Kosovo in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001 resonate with similar comments from Iraq in 2003.<sup>106</sup> In his *Parameters* article Murphy draws attention to both the slow nature of an “organizational change” and, attributed to indoctrination and experience, a “cultural bias toward the kinetic,” both of which have inhibited the U.S. military’s ability to identify opportunities and “exploit success in the information environment.”<sup>107</sup>

While doctrine should be at the heart of shaping change within the military, the bureaucratic process associated with its production is such that it is “in many ways a

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<sup>103</sup> Andrew Mackay and Steve Tatham, “Behavioural Conflict: From General to Strategic Corporal: Complexity, Adaptation and Influence,” *The Shrivenham Papers*, no. 9, (December 2009): 9.

<sup>104</sup> At the time, General Mackay was the brigade commander.

<sup>105</sup> S P Rosen, “Winning the Next War: Innovation & the Modern Military” (1991), quoted in Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict*, 28.

<sup>106</sup> Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict*, 28.

<sup>107</sup> Dennis M. Murphy, “In Search of the Art and Science of Strategic Communication,” *Parameters* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2009-10): 107. Murphy is a professor at the U.S. Army War College.



trailing indicator of institutional learning.”<sup>108</sup> Mackay and Tatham highlight U.S. military efforts to “facilitate comparatively immediate exchanges, by practitioners in operational theatres, and will allow the ‘*right*’ operational experience to rise to prominence.”<sup>109</sup> They suggest that “the U.K. Armed Forces educational and learning programme, which in many instances does not need large scale capital investment but instead a shedding of the shackles of process management and ‘*conventional wisdom*’” is a means to enhancing institutional education. Without an educational grounding that exposes the whole concept of strategic communication, political ‘interference’, media invasiveness, the power of the cognitive domain and the battle of the narrative the ‘centrality of influence’ will remain peripheral.

Linked to the requirement for a broader and more readily-adaptable learning organisation, Mackay and Tatham argue for the “expansion and professionalization of certain key information age enablers – notably information, media and psychological operations practitioners and, of equal importance, their directing and command arrangements within the MoD.”<sup>110</sup> At the strategic level, they concluded that the MoD was stove-piped into “not only information operations, but also psychological operations, media operations, consent-winning activities, profile and posture activities.”<sup>111</sup> In itself, this structural divide is not surprising given the absence of doctrine that promotes a holistic approach to strategic communication and influence activity. The on-going development of JDP 3-80 *Influence* by DCDC should assist in understanding how structures, such as those that exist in the MoD, might integrate and better synchronise

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<sup>108</sup> John A. Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), 7.

<sup>109</sup> Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict*, 31.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

under the banner of the ‘centrality of influence’. Of note, U.S. Joint Forces Command make a similar observation, “however, JP 5-0, JP 3-0 and JP 3-33, *Joint Task Force Headquarters*, currently do not discuss organizational structures or processes specifically for planning, and executing strategic communication related activities.”<sup>112</sup>

The military’s organisational and professional media interactions are a constant subject of some criticism. James Lacey, a U.S. military sympathetic *Time* magazine Iraq ‘embed’, commented: “the PAO (Public Affairs Officer) process needs to be radically rebuilt. Critical to accomplishing this is reversing the passive mind-set of the PAO community such that it ceases being a filter for information and becomes actively engaged in making sure information gets out the door.”<sup>113</sup> In a similar vein, Chris Bucktin, a reporter for *News of the World* (the world’s biggest English language newspaper), reported of the Iraq 2003 offensive: “war reporting presented many new challenges, the foremost being stiff upper-lip resistance from officers.”<sup>114</sup> Not only has modern warfare exposed a difference between the world’s perception of the United States and the United Kingdom and their perception of themselves, but it has had exactly the same impact between their militaries and their respective domestic medias.

Winning modern media wars is a complex dynamic that goes far beyond conveying the military response. Enter the battle of the narrative. Developing the power to influence requires those who plan and advise the commander to be an integral part of the command team – influence must be mainstream. As such, an appropriate foundation,

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<sup>112</sup> U.S. Joint Forces Command, *Commander’s Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy*, version 2, Joint Warfighting Center (Suffolk, VA, 2009), II-9.

<sup>113</sup> James Lacey, “Who’s Responsible for Losing the Media War in Iraq?” *Proceedings* (October 2004).

<sup>114</sup> Chris Bucktin, “Hello to All That” in *Embedded: The Media at War in Iraq, an Oral History*, ed. Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson (Guilford, Connecticut: Lyons Press, 2004), 89.

comprising not only doctrine and education, but also an appropriate organisational structure, is required. Filling influence activity appointments with individual augmentees who “often make their first appearance in a Brigade or Divisions preparation at the Mission Rehearsal Exercise” is a failure to embrace the concept of influence as an outcome-determining concept.<sup>115</sup>

Mackay and Tatham’s third key area identified as requiring attention is that of the military’s research capability. Their argument moves from, at the macro level, a lack of research capability to, at the micro level, a United Kingdom educational philosophy which leans more to “‘taught’ courses, whilst US staff courses are significantly more research-based – the sheer volume of highly original research undertaken and published by US students is indicative of this, so too the huge number of US military officers that gain PhDs.”<sup>116</sup> General Kiszely, in his paper “Post-Modern Challenges for Modern Warriors,” emphasises the importance of educational culture when he describes the mind-set required to tackle insurgencies:

Counter-insurgency, by contrast, characterised by ‘wicked problems’ does not lend itself to the reductionist, PowerPoint mind: the first essential step is spending time understanding the nature of the problem and all its many facets; to try and develop formulas, templates and ‘norms’ is to misunderstand the nature of the problem; the delivery of rapid and decisive effect is but one means – in many circumstances it may be not only singularly inappropriate, but actively counter-productive: and wiser counsel is sometimes ‘don’t do something, just sit there!’<sup>117</sup>

Education is essential to the effective application of strategic communication.

The breadth of the asymmetric contested space (not all areas will be battlefields) is such

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<sup>115</sup> Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict*, 25.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>117</sup> John Kiszely, “Post-Modern Challenges for Modern Warriors,” *The Shrivenham Papers*, no. 5, (December 2007): 9. At the time, Lieutenant General Kiszely was the Director of the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom.

that it cannot be replicated fully in training. Education must breach the gap.

Furthermore, if influence activity is to successfully nest within strategic communication, there is a requirement for “military leaders at all levels to possess political sophistication and nous – from the junior commander engaging with a local mayor, to more senior ones dealing with regional governors, right up to the most senior commanders interacting with and advising political leaders at national level.”<sup>118</sup> Given the pace of change in the operational environment and the inherent learning competition, General Kiszely also notes that, “To keep at the cutting edge of the subject, particularly in competition with a learning and adaptive enemy, requires a corpus, or body, of academic research experts alongside, and able to interact with, practitioners and students.”<sup>119</sup> In the broad context of the security environment exerting influence, communicating by word and deed will demand an understanding of culture, economics, diplomacy and social psychology. Mackay and Tatham are equally emphatic: “education, learning, unlearning and relearning at every level, from Commander to strategic Corporal, is likely to be the pre-eminent factor in success in future conflict.”<sup>120</sup>

Finally, albeit mentioned only briefly, Mackay and Tatham highlight the issue of the relationship between the strategic and tactical level narratives: “it is clear that not only are Whitehall messages a diluted and distant memory by the time they reach the tactical level but they may actually have no relevance at ground level anyway.”<sup>121</sup> The authors recognise the requirement for an overarching framework or supra-narrative, a National Information Strategy, requiring each component to be consistent with the next.

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<sup>118</sup> Kiszely, *Post-Modern Challenges for Modern Warriors*, 15.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>120</sup> Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict*, 5.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Yet there is inherent friction in the process as “generic messaging from afar” must be translated in to influence activity that is “local in nature.”<sup>122</sup> To achieve this restrictive control mechanisms must be relaxed: “we must empower our people, particularly the strategic corporals and privates, and our observation is that this empowerment, in any meaningful manner, is rarely forthcoming.”<sup>123</sup> Further responsibility must be devolved to those who are closest to the target audience.

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<sup>122</sup> Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict*, 16.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS

The Athenian ships would come up in support of the Corcyraeans whenever they were hard pressed and would do help to alarm their enemies, but they did not openly join the battle, since the commanders were afraid of acting contrary to the instructions they had received at Athens.

- Thucydides<sup>124</sup>

At its outset, the revolution in ICT and the opportunities it presented led many militaries, with the U.S. DoD setting the pace, to explore ‘battlefield digitization’. The vision was of a technology-driven ‘network enabled capability’ with the goal of achieving ‘information dominance’.<sup>125</sup> This vision, however, neglected to fully recognise that the information explosion enabled not only the military but the media and potential adversaries. Information dominance may be impossible, but the enduring Clausewitzian premise that conflict is a battle of wills, and the distinct possibility that “battles and campaigns can be lost in the cognitive dimension,” demand the military’s utilisation of the information environment to achieve influence.<sup>126</sup>

Within the United Kingdom there is increasing recognition of the requirement for a pan-government approach to strategic communication but with no clear authority to lead these efforts. As strategic communication involves activities outside the purview of the military, the requirement for a collaborative working relationship is clear.

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<sup>124</sup> Thucydides, “The Dispute over Corcyra 433,” in *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by Rex Warner (Suffolk, Great Britain: Penguin Group, 1954), 64.

<sup>125</sup> Elizabeth A. Stanley-Mitchell, “The Digital Battlefield: What Army Transformation Efforts Say about Its Future Professional Jurisdiction,” in *The Future of the Army Profession*, ed. Lloyd J. Matthews (Boston: McGraw-Hill Primis, 2002), 129. Information dominance will enhance situational awareness, dissipating the fog of war thus enabling a tempo that will enable defeat of the enemy’s decision and action cycles.

<sup>126</sup> U.S. Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, 2-22.

Meanwhile, adversaries have already recognised the power that lies behind influencing public perceptions and will most certainly continue to exploit ICT advances. The United Kingdom's security narrative must be synchronised, word with deed, between governmental departments, within the military, with partners and be responsive to dynamics on the ground. Furthermore, the more coherent, interactive and experiential a narrative is, the greater the chance of a successful influence outcome. Government must lead in this venture, particularly given the requirement to embrace a proactive information engagement policy and to devolve authority. Any variances in interpretation of a strategic communication narrative are likely to contribute to a significant disjuncture between policy and practice, with mission success implications when exposed to global scrutiny and the actions of adversaries.

An antagonistic CMR is an obstacle to effective strategic communication implementation. The next United Kingdom general election is due to take place on or before June 3, 2010, barring exceptional circumstances. Given the global economic crisis and the likelihood of significant public expenditure limitations, the political debate about how the United Kingdom views itself as a world power and the associated size, capabilities and employability of her military provides a constructive opportunity. Naturally, with some projecting a "thirty billion pound defence budget shortfall in the long-run," there will be a temptation for the respective 'chiefs' to resort to inter-service rivalry.<sup>127</sup> The nature of this rivalry will manifest itself, most probably, through competing views of the security environment and those capabilities best placed to meet those perceived as enemies, threats and challenges. Strategic communication has,

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<sup>127</sup> Michael Clarke and Michael Codner, interviewed by RUSI, London, March 24, 2010.

arguably, some bearing on this debate, particularly if the Mackay and Tatham assertion is accepted:

“Engagement in conflict is not undertaken without expenditure of ‘*blood and treasure*’; influence can reduce the cost of both and can make the difference between mission success and failure.”<sup>128</sup>

From a ‘Whole of Government’ perspective, the case studies examined in Chapter Three indicate a requirement for HMG (including the MoD) to re-examine the “professional norms” of CMR against the demands of the global information environment.<sup>129</sup> The SDR, general election and possibility of a revision to the existing National Security Strategy all provide an opportunity for both parties, political and military, to move beyond the fractious CMR that surrounded the General Dannatt intervention. What is clear is that the restrictive control measures directed in DIN 03-20, and the cultural mindset this level of direction imbues, is the antithesis of effective strategic communication. As Professor Taylor, a recognised British authority on strategic communication, asserts:

Power should not be left to speak for itself. It needs explaining if it is to be accepted. Nor should a nation-state of whatever rank allow an information vacuum to form because its enemies will fill that vacuum with propaganda that needs to be countered. If a nation is not proactive on the information front, then it can only be reactive - and if it is reactive it is always on the defensive.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict*, 6.

<sup>129</sup> Thomas C. Bruneau and Florina Christiana Matei, “Towards a New Conceptualization of Democratization and Civil-Military Relations,” 916-917. The third mechanism – professional norms – means whether the security institutions have been recruited, educated, trained, promoted, and the like to have internalized the previous two control mechanisms (institutional control mechanisms and oversight), and thus to indeed act in accord with the goals of the civilians. [http://iis-db.stanford.edu/evnts/5541/Bruneau\\_final\\_file.pdf](http://iis-db.stanford.edu/evnts/5541/Bruneau_final_file.pdf) (accessed Jan 29, 2010).

<sup>130</sup> Philip M. Taylor, “Strategic Communications and the Relationship between Governmental ‘Information’ Activities in the Post 9/11 World.” *Journal of Information Warfare* 5, issue 3 (November 2006), 11. Taylor is Professor of International Communications and Director of the Institute of Communications Studies at the University of Leeds.



CMR must be such that strategic communication, and the subordinate Joint Action concepts, can exploit the benefits of a positive and proactive global information engagement rather than a defensive and reactive one.

In attempting to address internal military thinking, it is apparent that both the United Kingdom and United States are developing similar strategic communication doctrines. Given the confusion that surrounds the use of the word ‘strategic’, U.S. Joint Forces Command suggest using the term “Communication Strategy” and “leaving specific terms intact that describe efforts at the different levels of war.”<sup>131</sup> Alternatively, it can be argued that the use of the word ‘communication’ is somewhat limiting as it does not readily capture the relationship between the physical and psychological aspects of contemporary operations. Although regarded as semantics by some, the debate is important in developing an understanding of the differences between HMG activity and that of the military at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. There is also increasing convergence on the idea of the centrality of influence, but doctrine that provides the necessary linkage between all strategic communication associated capabilities is required. For the British, the development of JDP 3-80 *Influence* should be a matter of priority, particularly as formations, as demonstrated by 52 Brigade, are confronted by a “lack of corporate understanding.”<sup>132</sup> The requirement to engage with the wider security community during doctrine development is self-evident.

Although care must be taken to avoid militarisation, immediate action to rectify a lack of subject matter experts is required. In the meantime, mistakes are inevitable. Additionally, the concept of ‘Joint Action’ envisages an operating structure of ‘fires,

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<sup>131</sup> U.S. Joint Forces Command, *Commander’s Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy*, (Suffolk, VA, October 27, 2009), xi.

<sup>132</sup> Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict*, 14.

influence activity and manoeuvre' as a framework for the coordination and synchronisation of activity. That 52 Brigade had to create an "influence organisation architecture" indicates that further consideration of organisational solutions is required.<sup>133</sup> How the military might restructure its processes and, possibly, resources should, however, only follow when there is a sound grasp of the tenets of the strategic communication concept. Experimentation, studies, research and the Lessons Identified process should all be directed to actively contribute to the debate – as a matter of priority. In the words of Clausewitz, "Not until terms and concepts have been defined can one hope to make any progress in examining the questions clearly and simply ....",<sup>134</sup>

Finally, it is also necessary to address the "not yet culturally internalised" issue raised by General Richards. Kiszely, Mackay and Tatham all make a similar point:

All armed forces need to recognize that reliance on training and doctrine alone as tools for achieving success in post-modern warfare is misplaced, and that an important factor in the process ... is education.<sup>135</sup>

Large organisations, such as the British military, are in part, reliant on organisational stability, hence an inherent resistance to change. They are also, however, equally reliant on an ability to adapt rapidly to absorb technological and political change. The proliferation of ICT and ever-increasing accessibility to the internet and mass printed media have placed considerable strain on the ability of force-generating institutions to keep pace with the 'information age'. As Field Marshal Viscount William Slim noted when speaking on the burdensome business of preparation for war, "yet there is one

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<sup>133</sup> Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict*, 15.

<sup>134</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 132.

<sup>135</sup> John Kiszely, *Post-Modern Challenges for Modern Warriors*, 23.

important part of it that costs little – study.”<sup>136</sup> The temptation, particularly in times of financial constraint, is to resist change and invest in activities that have immediate impact rather than those whose impact is long term and difficult to quantify objectively. In the battle for the narrative, military leaders would benefit from a broad inculcation in the tenets of strategic communication and its integration within decision-making processes.

At its core, strategic communication seeks to convey information, through word and deed, that will attract support and influence opinion in support of national objectives. Consequently, there is a need to be proactive and to ensure that the presentation of actions is timely, positive, accurate and credible whilst at the same time, countering the adversary’s attempts to weaken public resolve. The ‘wars of choice’ in Iraq and Afghanistan have brought the nature of British CMR to the fore and exposed differences between a military at war and a nation that is not. United Kingdom political resolve in developing the strategic communication concept is vital but only likely if CMR is enhanced such that the trust required to enable the military to engage in the battle of the narrative is re-established.

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<sup>136</sup> Field Marshal Viscount Slim, *Defeat into Victory*, (Hong Kong: Papermac, 1986), 535.

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